



Venezuela President
Carlos Andres Perez

Pat Nixon And Latin Memories



Pat Nixon's coming trip to Venezuela may bring back some good—and bad—memories of the First Family's 1958 tour

By Vera Claser
Washington

First Lady Pat Nixon's forthcoming trip to Venezuela will remind Americans of one of her husband's finest hours—and may boost his sagging image. But she may be courting danger.

State Department officials pronounce Venezuela stable, with a booming economy. They say the "few handfults" of terrorists have been pushed back to the interior. But only two years ago State failed to warn the First Lady of ferment in Ghana, and five days after she made a good will visit

there, the government was overthrown by a military coup.)

In 1958, Nixon, then Vice President, barely escaped injury and possibly death in Venezuela. He tagged the episode "the greatest danger of my whole life," one of his "six crises." The Nixon's courage and coolness drew a Congressional commendation. Nixon's popularity soared.

Later this month when Pat arrives in Venezuela to attend the inauguration of President Carlos Andres Perez in Caracas, her motorcade may travel along

avenida Sucre, where, almost 16 years ago, mobs of Communists stoned, spat, shouted obscenities, shattered the windows of Nixon's car, and injured secretary Rose Mary Woods, "Muera Nixon!" (death to Nixon) was their cry.

After the Nixon's visit, Venezuela remained unsettled for years. In 1965, the late Robert F. Kennedy ran into problems there while on a Latin American tour.

At the last minute Kennedy switched plans and cut short that portion of his trip. A hair-raising account of

the Nixon's 1958 experience is carried in Earl Mazo's biography of the President.

"Two well-disciplined groups were in the plaza, each with a special mission. A group of more than a hundred was to barrage (the Nixons) with rocks and fruit. Then a unit of hardened experts was to follow through with home-made bombs . . .

"The windows on both sides of the (Nixon) car were now being bashed in. Shivers of glass flaked off and shot inside the car. A man tried to poke a pipe at

Nixon through a hole in a window.

" . . . Back in limousine No. 9, shattering glass injured Rose Mary Woods, the Vice President's secretary, and others.

" . . . Nixon decided in that split second to abandon the wreath-laying ceremony and head for safe territory (the U.S. Embassy). His car swerved off into an alley, with Mrs. Nixon's following.

"That decision saved their lives. It also spared his entourage and many of the 8000 screaming Venezuelans who crammed the plaza."